

How Do I Get My Freedom?

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Exodus 12:1-14; Matthew 18:15-20

September 7, 2008

^{TNK} **Exodus 12:1** The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ² This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you. ³ Speak to the whole community of Israel and say that on the tenth of this month each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household. ⁴ But if the household is too small for a lamb, let him share one with a neighbor who dwells nearby, in proportion to the number of persons: you shall contribute for the lamb according to what each household will eat. ⁵ Your lamb shall be without blemish, a yearling male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶ You shall keep watch over it until the fourteenth day of this month; and all the assembled congregation of the Israelites shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷ They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they are to eat it. ⁸ They shall eat the flesh that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs. ⁹ Do not eat any of it raw, or cooked in any way with water, but roasted -- head, legs, and entrails -- over the fire. ¹⁰ You shall not leave any of it over until morning; if any of it is left until morning, you shall burn it. ¹¹ This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly: it is a passover offering to the LORD. ¹² For that night I will go through the land of Egypt and strike down every first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and I will mete out punishments to all the gods of Egypt, I the LORD. ¹³ And the blood on the houses where you are staying shall be a sign for you: when I see the blood I will pass over you, so that no plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. ¹⁴ This day shall be to you one of remembrance: you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD throughout the ages; you shall celebrate it as an institution for all time.

^{NLT} **Matthew 18:15** "If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the fault. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. ¹⁶ But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you

say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If that person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. If the church decides you are right, but the other person won't accept it, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector. ¹⁸ I tell you this: Whatever you prohibit on earth is prohibited in heaven, and whatever you allow on earth is allowed in heaven. ¹⁹ "I also tell you this: If two of you agree down here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. ²⁰ For where two or three gather together because they are mine, I am there among them."

The scriptures from Exodus and from Matthew speak to us about the power of God to lead us to freedom. The Israelite story is one of being slaves for a long time in Egypt. Their servitude since Joseph and the Pharaoh had died had grown more harsh as each year passed by. Enslavement was a way of life to the people of God. It was a time of misery and pain. In the Gospel of Matthew the people of God learn from Jesus about the power of becoming free from the enslavement of guilt and shame and oppression. Forgiveness is the power of God to set us free from the bondage of lust, greed, hurt, and doing wrong against our neighbor. Freedom is a challenge to each of us and to the community of faith as a whole. It touches all of us. If one is not free, then we all are in the prison of guilt.

Freedom is not cheap. How does it happen? It is costly! What does it cost? Freedom is less about money and more about the high **value** of the soul and spirit. Freedom from slavery is more about power of **God** and less about the intimidation of demagogues and human demigods. Freedom is

costly, even pricey; but it requires more than dollars and cents. Freedom requires **commitment** and sacrifice – a willingness to give up and to get on. Freedom is God’s vision for dignity and for well being. It is not selfish or purely for myself. It is for you and for me and for the future generations. The kingdom of God’s love and mercy is the open invitation to freedom for all of God’s children.

Today’s vision of freedom is **not** about a political rally. Moses gives us a paint-brush **view**, a snapshot of a time when naysayers, fear mongers, and anger-burdened hearts received hope beyond their imagination. This **vision** was not the end of the line but the beginning of a trip that has yet to be completed. From a people who were told that God wanted them free, God called a man –Moses—to rise up in weakness, waving a staff and holding firm to the calling: *let my people go*. His words hit the most powerful human on earth right in the gut and drained him of his life.

Today is no different. The question is the same, “*How do I get my freedom?*” Who gives me the power to be free?

The Hebrew people were slaves under a cruel and demanding taskmaster. God called Moses to be their **deliverer** and to bring them from enslavement in Egypt to freedom beyond the wilderness in the Promised Land of Canaan. You would think this would be easy if God were doing it;

but the story is loaded with stubborn resistance, hesitancy and downright foolishness. The **bad judgment** of a powerful leader destroyed the lives of many innocents. Soldiers followed their leader to their doom as the water and mud of a sea bed sank their longed-for victory as they pursued the Hebrew people to force them return to their proper place as slaves and servants.

The story of God's blessing of freedom is alive today. Passover is the festival of this freedom that is just as real now as it was 3,000 plus years ago. The angel of death, who took the first born of humans and animals alike, exacted immeasurable grief from every house hold of the mighty emperor. No child, no family would be spared, except for blood spilled and placed on the doorways. Plague after **plague** did not soften the heart or change the mind of Pharaoh to let the Hebrew people go. Each plague - each opportunity to get right and to do right by God's people ended in **disaster**, **not freedom**. The **last plague**, the worst plague, is what shook the foundations of the palace. Death came without any prejudice against rich or poor, weak or powerful. Every Egyptian family became acquainted with the sight and sounds of death.

Today, when we walk forward to the chancel rail to receive heaven's gift of grace, we answer the question – *How do we get our freedom?* We

learn by our own failure that we cannot earn, achieve or demand payment for our good. We cannot grasp or steal our freedom. Only in the grace of God does freedom come to each of us. We walk to receive the bread and the cup of forgiveness. We cannot seize it by our own power but instead must yield to its power from the cross of Jesus.

The power of forgiveness is freedom to the one who wrongs another. This act of God's grace puts a person in a new frame of mind. It releases us from the enslavement of resentment and the shackles of addiction. Freedom is not for one alone who wrongs God or neighbor. Freedom belongs to the one whom God gives the opportunity and challenge to forgive the other. Freedom in forgiveness is not cheap and it demands much from each of us.

Today is the day of our freedom. How does it happen? It happens in this beautiful relationship of love for us that emanates from Jesus Christ our Lord. Come, taste and see the goodness and sweetness of grace. It is for you to receive now. Amen.